



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
United States Patent and Trademark Office
Address: COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
09/682,411	08/30/2001	Zheng Tang	45283.4	7773
22828	7590	05/11/2004	EXAMINER	
EDWARD YOO C/O BENNETT JONES 1000 ATCO CENTRE 10035 - 105 STREET EDMONTON, ALBERTA, AB T5J3T2 CANADA			CREPEAU, JONATHAN	
			ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
			1746	

DATE MAILED: 05/11/2004

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

09/682,411

Applicant(s)

TANG ET AL.

Examiner

Jonathan S. Crepeau

Art Unit

1746

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If the period for reply specified above is less than thirty (30) days, a reply within the statutory minimum of thirty (30) days will be considered timely.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 03 March 2004.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 11-23 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 11-23 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
- ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 - ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 - ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413) |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) | Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____ |
| 3) <input type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08) | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152) |
| Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____ | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

DETAILED ACTION

Response to Amendment

1. This Office action addresses claims 11-14 and newly added claims 15-23. All the claims are newly rejected under 35 USC §103 herein. However, the new ground of rejection applied to claim 15 was not necessitated by amendment (Applicant's argument that JP '472 does not expressly disclose polygonal shapes is deemed persuasive). Accordingly, this action is non-final.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

2. Claims 11, 15-17, and 21-23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 2-87472.

Regarding claims 11 and 15, the reference is directed to a solid oxide fuel cell comprising an electrode layer (2, 3) applied to an electrolyte layer (1). The electrode layer comprises discrete elements separated by substantially uniform gaps (see abstract; Fig. 5). As shown in Figure 6C, the discrete elements appear to have a generally circular shape and are evenly and uniformly spaced.

JP '472 does not expressly teach that the discrete elements are polygonal in shape, particularly hexagonal, as recited in claims 11 and 15-17, or that such polygons or hexagons have parallel edges.

However, the claimed shapes of the discrete elements are a matter of choice which a person of ordinary skill in the art would have found obvious, absent sufficient evidence to the

Art Unit: 1746

contrary (MPEP §2144.04 (IV)). As such, the claimed polygonal and hexagonal shapes of the discrete elements are considered to be obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art.

The reference also does not expressly teach that the gaps between elements take up less than about 5%, 2%, or 1% of the surface area of the electrode, as recited in claims 11 and 21-23.

However, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made because the artisan would be sufficiently motivated to make the gaps as thin as possible in the interest of increasing contact area and decreasing electrical resistance. Accordingly, Applicants' claimed ranges are also not considered to distinguish over the reference. Furthermore, the recitations of linear gaps, uniform gaps, and parallel edges would also be rendered obvious due to the close packing of the hexagonal electrode elements on the electrolyte sheet.

3. Claim 18 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 2-87472 as applied to claims 11, 15-17, and 21-23 above, and further in view of Carolan et al (U.S. Patent 5,750,279).

JP '472 does not expressly teach that a contact paste is coated on the electrode, as recited in claim 18.

Carolan et al. is directed to a solid oxide fuel cell. In column 6, lines 23-28, the reference teaches a conductive paste located between the electrode and interconnector.

Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made because the artisan would be motivated to use the conductive paste of Carolan et al. between the electrode of JP '472 and an interconnector. In column 13, line 41, Carolan teaches that "[t]he conductive material 340, 342 serves to direct electrons from the anode layer 326 to the interconnect layer 316, and from the interconnect layer 316 to the cathode layer 332." Thus, the artisan would be motivated to use the conductive paste of Carolan et al. between the electrode of JP '472 and an interconnector in hopes of improving electrical conductivity (i.e., decreasing electrical resistance) between the two.

4. Claims 12 and 14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 2-87472 as applied to claims 11, 15-17, and 21-23 above, and further in view of Ruhl et al (U.S. Patent 6,361,892).

JP '472 further teaches that the electrode layer is made by photo-etching in the abstract. However, the reference does not expressly teach that the electrode is made by screen-printing followed by sintering, as recited in claim 12.

Ruhl et al. is directed to a solid oxide fuel cell comprising an electrode layer applied to an electrolyte layer, which electrode layer comprises discrete elements (see col. 8, lines 39-42; Figs. 2 and 3). The electrode layer may be made by screen printing, etching, or photolithography, among other methods, which can be followed by sintering (see col. 6, line 29; col. 8, line 22 et seq).

Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made because the disclosure of Ruhl et al. indicates that screen printing and photolithography (photo-etching) are equivalent methods for fabricating discrete SOFC electrode elements. As such, it would have been obvious to substitute the screen printing process of Ruhl et al. for the photolithographic process of JP '472. An express suggestion to substitute one equivalent component or process for another is not necessary to render such substitution obvious. *In re Fout*, 675 F.2d 297, 213 USPQ 532 (CCPA 1982); MPEP §2144.06. Further, the sintering step disclosed by Ruhl would also be an obvious modification of the process of JP '472 because the solid oxide fuel cell of JP '472 would be operated at a high temperature that would require sintering of the components.

5. Claim 13 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 2-87472 in view of Ruhl et al. as applied to claims 12 and 14 above, and further in view of Carolan et al (U.S. Patent 5,750,279).

JP '472 does not expressly teach that a contact paste is coated on the electrode, as recited in claim 13.

Carolan et al. is directed to a solid oxide fuel cell. In column 6, lines 23-28, the reference teaches a conductive paste located between the electrode and interconnector.

Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made because the artisan would be motivated to use the

Art Unit: 1746

conductive paste of Carolan et al. between the electrode of JP '472 and an interconnector (separator). In column 13, line 41, Carolan teaches that "[t]he conductive material 340, 342 serves to direct electrons from the anode layer 326 to the interconnect layer 316, and from the interconnect layer 316 to the cathode layer 332." Thus, the artisan would be motivated to use the conductive paste of Carolan et al. between the electrode of JP '472 and an interconnector in hopes of improving electrical conductivity (i.e., decreasing electrical resistance) between the two.

6. Claims 19 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 2-87472 in view of Carolan et al. as applied to claim 18 above, and further in view of Singh et al (U.S. Patent 5,516,597).

Carolan et al. further teach that the conductive material may be formed from an electrode material (see col. 6, line 26). However, Carolan et al. do not expressly teach that the conductive material is lanthanum cobaltate, as recited in claim 19.

Singh et al. is directed to a solid oxide fuel cell. In column 6, line 52, Singh et al. teach the following:

niques. The air electrode is typically comprised of doped and undoped mixtures of metal oxides such as LaMnO_3 , CaMnO_3 , LaNiO_3 , LaCoO_3 , LaCrO_3 , and other electrically conducting metal oxides. The dopants are typically Sr, Ca, Ce, Ni, Fe, Sn, Ba, Ce or the like. The preferred air electrode

Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made because the artisan would be motivated by Singh et al. to use lanthanum cobaltate as the conductive material of Carolan et al. Carolan et al. disclose that a suitable material is electrically conductive or an electrode material. In the passage above, Singh et al. identify LaCoO_3 as being electrically conducting and an electrode material. The selection of a known material based on its suitability for its intended use has been held to be *prima facie* obvious (MPEP §2144.07). Thus, the artisan would have been sufficiently skilled to use LaCoO_3 as the conductive material of Carolan et al.

Response to Arguments

7. Applicant's arguments filed March 3, 2004 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive insofar as they apply to the present rejections. With regard to JP '472, Applicants assert that this reference "teaches away from tight packing as the electrode strips or dots must be widely spaced to permit gas flow." However, the Examiner does not find a teaching relating to gas flow the abstract of JP '472. As such, the abstract does not "teach away" from narrow spacing of the elements. In fact, the drawings of the publication indicate that gas actually flows perpendicular to the electrode surface and not parallel thereto, as apparently asserted by Applicants. In Figure 6B, the electrode material (2) is laid out in strips which intersect each other at right angles. In this configuration, gas would likely not be flowed in the direction parallel to the electrode because there is no clear, unobstructed flow path for the gas. Therefore,

Art Unit: 1746

Applicant's contention that the gas flows in a parallel manner is not supported by Figure 6B. In order to more fully ascertain the scope of the disclosure of JP '472, a full translation of the document has been ordered by the Examiner and will be made available to Applicants in the next communication. If Applicants wish to review the translation prior to this, Applicant's representative is kindly requested to contact the Examiner.

Conclusion

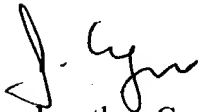
8. Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Jonathan Crepeau whose telephone number is (571) 272-1299. The examiner can normally be reached Monday-Friday from 9:30 AM - 6:00 PM EST.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Randy Gulakowski, can be reached at (571) 272-1302. The phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is (571) 272-1700. Documents may be faxed to the central fax server at (703) 872-9306.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR

Art Unit: 1746

system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).



Jonathan Crepeau
Patent Examiner
Art Unit 1746
May 7, 2004